

Sermon: Second Sunday after Epiphany (A) 1/18/26

Peace, Danville Pr. Lucy Kolin, preacher

Texts: Isaiah 49:1-7, John 1:29-42

Pastors have the privilege of hearing many different stories of how people come to know and follow Jesus. Some of those stories are told as people prepare to join the church; **some** emerge only after people have been part of a church community for a while and feel comfortable sharing the particulars of what or who introduced them to Jesus of Nazareth or encouraged them to be his disciple.

Often people say it was somebody **else's** testimony or invitation. That's what happened to Simon in today's gospel. His brother Andrew, having met Jesus, went to find Simon, and announced, "We have found the Messiah!" ...and Simon decided to meet Jesus for **himself**. But sometimes it's a **question** that draws people to Jesus...a question they've been chewing on for years or a question they didn't even **realize** was theirs, like the question **Jesus** asked in today's story.

Jesus seemed to like questions and to like asking them **himself**. Somebody has found that in the four gospels Jesus asks a question more than 300 times...and that's **not counting** the questions Jesus always asks at the end of his parables. **Today's** gospel contains the very **first** question Jesus asks in the Gospel of John. Now a Messiah and a Savior who asks so many questions might not seem like the one to follow. Is Jesus asking so many questions because he doesn't know the answers? Is Jesus trying to show off, to **impress** us into believing because he can answer so many of his own questions? Is Jesus asking us questions to see if we can qualify for discipleship? If **so**, can we make the cut? Or is Jesus trying to shame us or show us up, to expose the fact that we haven't got a clue, no less the correct answer to important questions of faith and life?

If **those** are any of your worries or suspicions, today's gospel can put them to rest. For it shows us a Jesus who isn't interested in playing "stump the chump" with unsuspecting human beings. Instead, we find a Jesus who is interested in questions for their ability to draw us to God, which is, of course, God's dearest hope and Jesus' own mission.

In **today's** story John the Baptizer shared with two of his disciples what had been revealed to him about Jesus: that he was "the Lamb of God." Hearing this, the two turned and followed Jesus, a sign of their curiosity and interest in Jesus **and** an indication that in what John said about Jesus they found something that connected with their deepest hopes and desires.

Jesus, turning around and seeing the two following, stopped and asked **them** a question, "What are you looking for?" This was a question that revealed Jesus' interest in **them**, a question designed to draw them out about their hopes and dreams and desires...for a Messiah...**and for themselves.**

The two were caught off guard by Jesus' question, so they answered with a question of **their own**: "Teacher, where are you staying?" To us, that question seems a little strange: why were they asking Jesus' address when **Jesus** had just asked about their deepest hopes and dreams, when Jesus had asked the original "seekers" question, if you will? But lo and behold, without knowing it, their answer was one that Jesus could work with. Because Jesus wasn't looking for the right answer. Jesus was looking for a person who, somewhere deep inside, was yearning for a relationship with God, who wanted to live in the presence of God, in the very heart of God, who understood that to be in relationship with Jesus was the way to address life's deepest questions and discover the Way, the Truth, and the Life they had been seeking.

Of course, the writer of the Fourth Gospel has prepared us for this from the very first verses of his Gospel, where we find Jesus described as pitching his tent among us, living with us and among us to let his light

shine, illuminating the heart of God. Because the “answer” the world needs isn’t a dictionary word or a scholarly thesis; it’s the Word made flesh, who we know not in facts or in dogma, but in **relationship**.

That’s why Jesus answered, “Come and see.” Yes, he invited them to the place where he was staying, but he **also** invited them to much **more**: to life together with the one **with** whom, **from** whom, and **through** whom they would discover their **true** questions **and** their true **answer**...Jesus, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. “Come and see,” Jesus said. He knew that it was what these two human beings would see and experience with him that would form them and fill them and draw them to give themselves to God and to the world God loves...even as **Jesus** did. For we remember how, in the end, Jesus was willing to let the house of his **body** be torn down so that the house of **love** would never be lost. And when he hung on the cross, Jesus said to Mary, “Woman, here is your son,” and to the disciple whom Jesus loved, “Son, here is your mother.” Jesus did not die without making a home for those he loved. And when he rose, Jesus returned to announce that the house of love still stood and to send disciples out to invite the **whole world** to come and stay, to come and see their deepest desires – love, peace, justice, mercy, joy – fulfilled.

In today’s story, the gospel writer tells us the two disciples “came and saw where Jesus was staying...and...remained with him that day.” The rest of the Fourth Gospel is the story of how Jesus came and remained with his **disciples** not just a day, but forever...of how he is with us still, in the waters of baptism and in the word and under bread and wine, continuing to welcome us into his house, which is not so much a place as a **relationship**, everlasting friendship with God.

Jesus welcomes questions...Jesus uses questions...Jesus **gives** us questions to show us how to follow him in love. Tomorrow we will commemorate Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., remembering that great prophet and justice-maker and disciple of Jesus. Dr. King did not run

away from the questions **and** learned to ask the questions **Jesus** showed him, questions that shone a light on what following Jesus means for us and all our neighbors. He often asked the same simple questions **Jesus** asked, questions that in their simplicity often became the **hardest** questions, that disturbed some people but comforted many others and encouraged them to live out their faith boldly, even sacrificially. Once, in reflecting on the parable of the Good Samaritan, Dr. King wrote, “The first question which the priest and the Levite asked was: ‘If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me? But the Good Samaritan reversed the question: “If I do **not** stop to help this man, what will happen to **him**?”” Is this not the story of the different reactions, some deadly, some saving that we are seeing in what is happening in Minnesota and elsewhere in our country right now? What might happen if we all, whatever our status or office, our political views or place in the community, asked the question the Good Samaritan asked?

Now that you and I are at home with God, **we** are called to turn and see who is following **us**, who is looking for an invitation. Now at home with God who is at home with questions, **we** are called to encourage **other people’s questions**, to make a home for them in **this** community, to provide a safe place to discover, ask, and explore what they’re looking for, which, at its core, is the desire to be in relationship with God, a desire planted in **all** God’s creatures. Now we prepare to eat and drink the meal that binds us anew to God and God to us and gives us power to go and tell the world, “We have found the Messiah!”...which is never the end, only the **beginning** of life-long friendship and dialogue with God...and with each other. Thanks be to God! And welcome home!